



Thinking

About Christian Unity

Part One

By

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Introduction to Unity

In 1966, a songwriter by the name of Peter Scholte wrote a song that quickly became a theme for Christian unity around the world. It was called “We are One in The Spirit.” Churches still sing it decades later. The lyrics include -

- “We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord.”
- “And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.”
- “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”
- “We will work with each other, We will work side by side.”
- “We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand.”
- “And together we’ll spread the News that God is in our land.”

That is a wonderfully “idealistic” song. How great it would be if Christians were one in the Spirit and one in the Lord, working side by side, walking hand in hand, spreading the news that God is in our land.

Jesus Christ is the greatest Idealist I’ve ever known. Jesus told His disciples – “I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Just moments before Jesus was arrested and taken to the Cross, He prayed to His Father a beautifully idealistic prayer:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in

Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

John 17:20-23

Jesus included you and me in His prayer (“those who will believe in Me through their word”). Unity, being one even as Jesus is One with His Father, is our Lord’s desire for His Church. So, how are we doing with that unity thing?

Historical Unity

According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (2011) there are about 41,000 Christian denominations and organizations in the world. Given that there is some overlapping because of cultural distinctions in some countries, the number is probably closer to about 38,000; still a very big number and a long way from the Lord's ideal of unity – “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

It's easy to look back and point our collective fingers at the Christians who came before us. How did the Church of the 1st Century AD go from “one” group of redeemed people to tens of thousands of groups in just 2,000 years? Well, think about what happened during those 2,000 years – more than 100,000 Sundays and more than 700,000 total days.

Christianity is lived out by Christians daily and from Sunday to Sunday. Even if Christians don't see each other during the week, they see each other every Sunday during fellowship, study and worship. That's millions of sermons, Bible studies, hymns, handshakes and hugs over a period of two millennia. A lot can happen to a growing group of people during that time, especially when they have an enemy of their unity working day and night, week after week, month after month, year after year.

What happened to the Church, the Body of Christ, during the past 2,000 years is that we had two kinds of “unity issues.” One was “doctrinal” unity and the other was “practical” unity. What do you see when you read the sermons and letters of pastors and other Church leaders in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries? Powerful defenses against direct attacks on the “doctrinal unity” of the Church. They preached against doctrinal error, taught against doctrinal error and went head to head with the leaders of doctrinal error.

Those spiritual battles of the early centuries of the Church led to a number of excommunications that caused many teachers of error to begin their own groups. Many of those “error” groups disappeared after their founders and/or second generation leaders died.

Schisms within the “professing” Church during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries eventually led to the “Great Schism” of the 11th Century that saw a deep divide between the Western Church headquartered in Rome and the Eastern Church headquartered in Constantinople. That division included many bloody battles with Christians killing Christians, each side believing it was the continuation of the original Christian Church begun by Jesus Christ and His apostles. The division between East and West, though friendlier today, is still a major division.

The 14th and 15th centuries saw a split within the Catholic Church known as the “Western Schism.” Two men claimed to be the true pope at the same time. The two papal groups were headquartered in Rome and Avignon. The schism was more political than theological

and the Council of Constance helped to bring the Western Schism to an end by the close of the 15th Century.

However, the Western Church was not finished with its problems because of deep theological issues. A protest within the Western Church to reform Catholic theology and practice led eventually to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. Some of the seeds of reformation were sowed as early as the 14th Century with leaders like John Wycliffe of England and Jan Hus of the Kingdom of Bohemia.

The Reformation gained great momentum under Martin Luther, a German Catholic monk and professor of theology during the 16th Century. He opposed the Catholic practice of selling indulgences stating that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (*sola fide* – by faith alone), not by works. Luther posted his famous “95 Theses” in 1517 AD (also known as the “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences”). Luther wrote the 95 Theses presented his views about purgatory and indulgences in an academic tone.

Luther’s refusal to retract what he wrote led to the Catholic Church excommunicating him (1521 AD) and Emperor Charles V condemning him as an outlaw. Other reformers of the 16th Century included John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli.

The Reformation led to what is known as Protestantism and a large number of “denominations.” One aspect of theology that most Protestant groups agreed on was a rejection of the Roman Catholic Church claim to be the “true Church of Jesus Christ.” That’s where

agreement ends for many Protestants. The fact that there are more than 33,000 Protestant denominations is evidence that they have many disagreements theologically and practically.

Will Christians ever be united again on earth? Most likely not. Will Christians ever be united again? Absolutely. In Heaven. I find no evidence in the Bible that there are thousands of divisions in Heaven based on earthly divisions among God's people. Some of the last words of Revelation are insightful as to who we will be in Heaven.

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:1-5

“His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.”

What name will be on our heads? Baptist? Catholic? Presbyterian? Brethren? Apostolic? Methodist? Orthodox? Pentecostal? Lutheran? Anglican? Episcopal? Reformed? Covenant? Congregational?

Mennonite? Missionary? Nazarene? Grace? Gospel? No. The Name on our heads will be His Name. We belong to the Lord God and we will carry His Name into eternity.

Flipping Unity

The True Church of Jesus Christ (made up of true believers – those who are truly saved and members of the Body of Christ) is under pressure to do something today that it should not do. The Church is being asked to flip its Unity priorities from **Doctrinal-Practical** to **Practical-Doctrinal**.

The Greek word translated by the English word “unity” is used only twice in the Bible – both times by the Apostle Paul, both times in the same chapter of the same Book of the Bible.

“... endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...” Ephesians 4:3

“... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ ...” Ephesians 4:13

“one” (*heis*). The idea is “oneness, unanimity.” The Apostle Paul used it with the Ephesians to emphasize the importance of unity among Christians.

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as

you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.” Ephesians 4:1-6

It’s important to note that Paul spent the first half of his letter to the Ephesians dealing with unity from a **doctrinal** perspective. There are many people in Christian circles who believe **practical** perspective should trump doctrine for the sake of **unity** among Christians, but that’s not how God presents His Truth. He always begins with **right doctrine** that guides **right practice**. God does not sacrifice “truth” for the sake of imagined “unity” by His people.

The True Church of Jesus Christ (made up of true believers – those who the Spirit of God saves and places into the Body of Christ) is under pressure to do something today that it should not do. The Church is being asked to flip its Unity priorities from **Doctrinal-Practical** to **Practical-Doctrinal**.

I bring this up because the Church is facing big challenges to Paul’s teaching about “unity” among believers. There are too many challenges to detail all of them in one brief Ebook, so we’ll look at three of them in this series that are among the most challenging to the Church: **Ecumenical, Emerging** and **Apostolic**.

Ecumenical Unity

The **World Council of Churches** grew out of the ecumenical movement that began after World War I. The World Council began after World War II (1948) for the purpose of seeking “to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (World Council of Churches)

The World Council of Churches motto (2015) states that the WCC is “A worldwide fellowship of churches seeking unity, a common witness and Christian service.”

What does that mean for individual member churches?

“As members of this fellowship, WCC member churches: are called to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship; promote their common witness in work for mission and evangelism; engage in Christian service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation; and foster renewal in unity, worship, mission and service.” (World Council of Churches, About Us)

Notice that “visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship” is the first purpose mentioned. But what does “visible unity” mean? The WCC says it represents more than half-a-billion Christians who attend a variety of denominations, including African, Anglican, Apostolic, Baptist, Christian (Disciples of Christ), Church of Christ,

Congregational, Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Old Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Protestant, Quaker, Reformed, and United churches (read <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches> for detailed list). Given that broad spectrum of doctrinal positions, how do those member churches practice unity and what kind of unity is it?

The WCC adopted the *Toronto Statement* in 1950. Here's a small part of what it says concerning the Council and how it views the theology of individual member churches.

“The Council as such cannot possibly become the instrument of one confession or school without losing its very *raison d'être*. There is room and space in the World Council for the ecclesiology of every church which is ready to participate in the ecumenical conversation and which takes its stand on the Basis of the Council, which is ‘a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour’”. *Toronto Statement*, World Council of Churches, 1950

Make note of the words “ecumenical conversation,” because that will come up again as we look at the current “unity movement.”

The National Council of Churches was started in 1950 for the stated purpose of “ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States.” Those groups include the Catholic Church, Evangelical and Pentecostal, “and other Christian bodies”. The NCC also works with other religious groups as explained at the NCC official website.

“In addition to ecumenical partnerships, NCC promotes harmonious relations among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, practitioners of traditional Native American religion and many other faith groups in a society that is increasingly multireligious. The NCC has been particularly focused on building relationships between Christians and Muslims in the aftermath of the national crisis of September 2001.” *National Council of Churches*

Notice that the NCC promotes “harmonious relations” among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, practitioners of traditional Native American religion and many other “faith groups” in a society that is “increasingly multireligious.” Is that what the Apostle Paul meant when he called on Christians in Ephesus to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”? Is that our Lord’s definition of “unity” in John 17? Notice what the National Council of Churches describes as “genuine unity.”

“Reflecting the rich variety of its members, the NCC believes that genuine unity demands inclusivity and a respect for diversity, and strives to embody this belief in its programs, decision-making, and staffing.” *National Council of Churches*

There’s another important word to note: **inclusivity**. The World Council and National Council of Churches want more inclusivity and less exclusivity in their member churches. Does that sound anything like what Jesus said to the churches in Revelation or what the apostles wrote the early Church? Tell me if you see “inclusivity” or

“exclusivity” in these words to the Church.

“... you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars ...” Revelation 2:2

“... *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan ...” Revelation 2:9

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” Revelation 2:14-16

“I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” Revelation 2:20-24

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” Revelation 3:1-4

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9

“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” 1 John 1:18-19

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” 1 John 4:1-3

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” 2 Peter 2:1-3

“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude 3-4

“These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” Jude 16-19

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:25-31

The “doctrine” of Jesus Christ – the same Jesus Who prayed that His followers would be “one” even as He and His Father are “one” – is “exclusive” when it comes to false teachers and false doctrine. There is no place for inclusivity when that means allowing error into the

teaching and practice of the Church.

The mission statement of the National Council of Churches is –

“The NCC is a community of communions called by Christ to visible unity and sent forth in the Spirit to promote justice, peace, and the healing of the world.” (<http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/>)

That’s an interesting mission statement in light of the real “mission” Jesus said the Holy Spirit would have on earth:

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.” John 16:8-15

When the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul out from the church that was at Antioch, He said – “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). The other teaching prophets at Antioch, along with others in the church, fasted,

prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. Barnabas and Saul (Paul), “being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went to Seceucia and Cyprus – “And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (Acts 13:5).

“Preaching the Word of God” is what Paul and Barnabas, and later Paul and Silas, did throughout their missionary journeys. The Holy Spirit called them out of Antioch to do a specific “work” that was aligned with what Jesus said the Spirit would do when He came – “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Acts 16:8-11).

The key to determining whether a “unity movement” in the Church aligns with God’s purpose is to compare the stated purpose of the movement with the stated purpose of God. If they don’t line up, then be wise and hear the warning of the Apostle Peter –

“For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and

overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'" 2 Peter 2:18-22

The so-called "unity" of the National and World Councils of Churches is dangerous to the health of the True Church and should be avoided and exposed.

Emerging Unity

The positions and activities of the National and World Councils of Churches should be obvious to Christians who are careful to discern truth and error. However, something that is not as obvious is known as the **Emerging/Emergent Church**.

The Investigation Begins

I wanted to be a news reporter from about the age of ten and never lost that dream. What do you do with dreams? You do the hard work of making them a reality. I got my first full-time job as a reporter in 1968 and took the “theories” of college into the “real world” of crime scenes, city council meetings, fires and accidents, school board meetings, and hard-nosed investigative stories. I quickly learned that those were the kinds of stories that were important, exciting, and sometimes dangerous.

The best investigations are those done with “first-hand” information. That’s when the investigator talks with eyewitnesses and looks at “original” or “primary source” materials and information. It is time-consuming, complicated and often confrontational. Most journalists don’t do investigative journalism for those and other reasons. However, I believe it’s extremely important to do for the welfare of society.

The investigation into the next two types of “Christian unity” we are currently seeing in and around the Church are based on original/primary source materials and information. I’ve met and talked with people who are involved in the unity movements. I’ve read their books and materials, attended their conferences and watched their videos and listened to their podcasts and other audio materials. I want to know what people believe based on what they say they believe, not on what individuals who are biased against a unity movement say about that movement.

I personally believe Christians should be deeply concerned about each of the following unity movements within the Church. However, my concern is not because someone else said they are concerned. I’m concerned because I talked with people in those movements, heard what they said and read what they wrote. I’m concerned because of what people in those movements believe and are doing about what they believe.

My investigation is finished (for now) and it’s time to report my findings. I’ll begin with some history of each unity group, what leaders in those groups believe and say, and why Christians should be concerned.

The E/EC

I have had the opportunity to speak personally with people in the Emerging/Emergent Church (E/EC) movement. I found most of them likeable people, but personality is not the issue. What is the issue is how members and leaders of the movement are attempting to change the long-held orthodox beliefs about God, the Bible and the Gospel of Christ for the purpose of developing unity within the “faith” community.

I also had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Norman Geisler, well-known theologian, professor, apologist and philosopher, about the Emerging/Emergent Church movement. He presented a cogent and well-structured argument about E/EC during a presentation I attended in 2014. We talked about several points of his presentation at the end of the meeting and continued our discussion via email. Dr. Geisler participated with several other Christian scholars in writing an important book titled *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent* (Edited by William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway, B&H Academic, 2009) and I will share pertinent information from that book during our study.

My goal for you in this chapter is to be as informed as possible about the E/EC movement so you can recognize it and address it in any way God’s Spirit leads you.

What's In A Name

Some people say “emerging” and some people say “emergent.” What’s the difference?

The word “emerging” means “newly created or noticed and growing in strength or popularity; becoming widely known or established” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The word “emergent” means “rising unexpectedly, calling for prompt action, rising out of or as if out of a fluid, newly formed or prominent.”

E/EC leader Tony Jones wrote *The New Christians: Dispatches From The Emergent Frontier* in 2008 (Jossey-Bass) and defined the terms this way –

emergent Christianity – The new forms of Christian faith arising from the old; the Christianity believed and practiced by the emergent’s.

the emergent church – The specifically new forms of church life rising from the modern, American church of the twentieth century.

the emergents – The adherents of emergent Christianity.

Emergent – Specifically referring to the relational network which formed first in 1997; also known as Emergent Village.

Historical Considerations

In the Introduction to *The New Christians*, Jones shares some of the history of the beginnings of the E/EC –

“On June 21, 2001, a group of pastor-theologians convened a conference call. We were homeless. Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt, Tim Keel from Kansas City, Chris Seay from Houston, Tim Conder from Chapel Hill, and Brad Cecil from Dallas had all been pushed out of the nest of our hosting organization a year earlier, and we were looking for some identity, some banner under which we could rally. We needed a name. In previous iterations, we had been called the ‘Young Leaders Network,’ the ‘Theological Working Group,’ and the ‘Terranova Project.’ Under that last rubric, we (and several others, including Sally Morgenthaler, Alan Roxburgh, Danielle Shroyer, Rudy Carrasco, Todd Hunter, and Jason Mitchell) had met less than a year earlier at my family’s cabin in the north woods of Minnesota and had spent a couple of days thinking and arguing and dreaming about the future of Christianity. We’d already been tagged with phrases ‘emerging church’ and ‘emerging leaders’ in years past, and those phrases came up again on this conference call. In the midst of the conversation, we settled on a variant of that word: we’d call ourselves ‘emergent ... Like the electronica music of the 1980s and 1990s, the emergent church is a mash-up of old and new, of theory and practice, of men and women, and of mainline, evangelical, and, increasingly, Roman Catholic Christians. What

started among leaders (a.k.a. clergy) is now spreading into the humus of everyday Christians (a.k.a. laypeople).”

In his book, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (JoPa Group, 2011), Tony Jones shared more about the history of E/EC –

“I come to this study of the emerging church movement not as a disinterested researcher, but as a member of the movement—indeed, as a found of the movement. In the summer of 1998, I was invited by Doug Pagitt, a former colleague in youth ministry, to help plan an event for that fall. The event was the ‘National Re:Evaluation Forum; sponsored by Leadership Network, then Doug’s employer. At that gathering, a couple hundred evangelical pastors heard from such speakers as Rodney Clapp, Carol Davis, Stanley Grenz, George Hunsberger, Jimmy Long, Sally Morgenthaler, Christine and Tom Sine, Len Sweet, Thom Wolf, and the as-yet-unknown Mark Driscoll. Original music and artwork were on display. And many in attendance felt that some kind of renaissance within evangelicalism was just around the corner. A newsletter from Leadership Network recapped the event by stating that six themes had emerged that would ‘represent a framework for discussing the church of the future, the church on the New Edge’: Community, Experience, Mysticism, Story, Leadership, and Missional ... The evolution of the emerging church movement from then to now I documented in my 2008 book, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Therein I argued that the

primary characteristic that epitomizes the movement and makes it distinctive is epistemic humility, a phrase that will be repeated in this book. An early theme in the movement was that the churches and seminaries from which we were emerging had grown too certain about their stands on doctrinal issues, polity, and social issues.”

The Emerging/Emergent Church (E/EC) is based on “conversations,” “reflections,” “stories,” “journeys,” and “friendships.” Those are key terms in E/EC circles you will see and hear often in Emergent books, blogs, articles, sermons, presentations and videos.

Movement members I’ve talked to don’t like traditional labels like “conservative” and “liberal” or “evangelical.” They prefer the term “emergent” and “emerging.” In the groundbreaking E/EC book *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Edited by Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, Baker Books, 2007), the editors used the terms “emerging church” and “emergent.” Doug Pagitt wrote that “emergent” people are “a Generative Friendship of Missional Christians.”

“The Emergent imagination is at its most basic level a call to friendship—friendship with God, with one another, and with the world. This has implications in the way Emergent is structured, in the way people relate to each other with differences and agreement, and in the way the Emergent Village forms and influences communities ... The Emergent concept of friendship is more than professional relationships of like-minded peers, it is an invitation to the Jesus way of life as partners with each other and

co-laborers in the work of God in the world.” *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt

Look at that again - closely. These are some of the primary leaders of the E/EC movement and they say that at its most basic level the Emergent movement is a call to friendship with God, one another “and the world.”

The first thing that came to mind when I read those words in *An Emergent Manifesto* was James 4:4 - “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Does what Pagitt and Jones wrote look like a contradiction with Scripture to you?

“The Emergent imagination is at its most basic level a call to friendship—friendship with God, with one another, and with the world.” Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” The Bible

Dr. Eddie Gibbs was the Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary in 2005 when he co-wrote *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*.

“The ‘emerging church’ movement is perhaps the most significant church trend of our day. The emerging church offers and

encourages a new way of doing and being the church. While it largely resonates with an eighteen-to-thirty-four-year-old audience--the first fully postmodern generation--it is also gaining popularity with older Christians and encompasses a broad array of traditional and contemporary churches. *Emerging Churches* explores this movement and provides insight into its success.” *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, Eddie Gibbs & Ryan K. Bolger, Baker Academic, 2005

One of the earliest books I found about the E/EC movement was written in 1970 by Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne. The book was titled *The Emerging Church* (Word Books), which is the same title of Dan Kimball’s book published in 2003.

Here’s a quote from Larson and Osborne’s book –

“We hear a sound of hope, a calling forth of a newly emerging Church, a demand for priority and commitment, and a word of instruction as to what the Church is to be. That voice among the voices says little to us about structure, institutional form, and traditional patterns. It speaks rather of new goals, considerable resources, and fresh strategies for the 1970’s.”

Here is a quote from Dan Kimball’s book from 2003 –

“What brings me great joy and makes the journey seem not as hard is knowing that I am not alone. So many of us out there are beginning to think the same things. So many of sense something

is changing. We don't know exactly how to explain it, but we all know it is real. I can't thank God enough for the friendships I have made along the road and the conversations we have had in helping one another on this journey. There are no solo acts or lone rangers in the emerging church. May our paths on this journey meet, as we truly are all in this together. Where it takes us, we cannot say. But I am eager to find out. I hope this book has helped you in some way, for the sake of the emerging church."

Kimball's book includes forewords by Rick Warren and Brian McLaren. Howard Hendricks, Sally Morgenthaler, Chip Ingram and Mark Oestreicher were collaborators with Kimball. The book's full title is *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. The "product description" for the book recommends reading *The Emerging Church* in conjunction with Brian McLaren's *A New Kind of Christian*.

For historical purposes, with 2001 as the date listed by Tony Jones for the official beginning of the Emergent Church, let's look at the writings of three of its founders: Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Chris Pagitt.

Brian McLaren

Time Magazine named Brian McLaren as one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America in 2005. He taught college English from 1978 to 1986, then helped form Cedar Ridge Community

Church in the Baltimore-Washington area. McLaren served as the founding pastor at Cedar Ridge until 2006 when he left to write and speak fulltime. During his time at Cedar Ridge, the church became known as a leader among emerging missional congregations.

McLaren says he is “an ecumenical global networker among innovative Christian leaders” (brianmclaren.net/about). He speaks at conferences around the world and also lectures to denominational and ecumenical leadership gatherings. McLaren says his public speaking covers topics on postmodern thought and culture, Biblical studies, evangelism, leadership, global mission, spiritual formation, worship, pastoral survival and burnout, inter-religious dialogue, ecology, and social justice (brianmclaren.net/about).

McLaren’s first book was published in 1998 – *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Zondervan). It dealt with the “conversation about postmodern ministry” at the end of the 20th century. McLaren’s second book, *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery guide for Your Spiritual Quest* (Zondervan, 1999) looked at the relationship between faith and certainty. Here’s an important insight into E/EC philosophy from one of its early leaders.

“Instead of trying to tell you ‘the answers’ via dogmatic pronouncements (as many well-meaning people have already tried to do for you, no doubt), I would like to try to help you find the answers yourself. Instead of trying to tell you *what* to believe or focusing on *why* you should believe, my goal is to help you discover *how* to believe—how to search for and find a faith that is

real, honest, good, enriching, and yours.” *Finding Faith*, Brian McLaren, Zondervan, 1999, Introduction

McLaren followed *The Church on the Other side* and *Finding Faith* with *A New Kind of Christian* (Jossey-Bass, 2001), *More Ready Than You Realize* (Zondervan, 2002), *Adventures in Missing the Point* (Zondervan, 2003, coauthored with Dr. Anthony Campolo), *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004), *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), *Everything Must Change* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), *Finding Our Way Again* (Thomas Nelson, 2008), *A New Kind of Christianity* (HarperOne, 2010), *Naked Spirituality* (HarperOne, 2011), *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?* (Jericho Books, 2012, about interfaith solidarity), *We Make the Road by Walking* (Jericho Books, 2014).

Here is how McClaren described *We Make the Road by Walking* –

“The title suggests that Christian faith is still ‘in the making’ (as Dr. John Cobb has put it). It continues to grow, evolve, learn, change, emerge, and mature ... in and through us. What we shall be as Christians in the 21st century, for better or worse, will surely change what Christian faith will be in the 22nd century and beyond.” Brianmclaren.net

Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, wrote a review in McLaren’s book that it is “one

of the most remarkable documents in recent Christian writings...There is no evangelizing here, and no preaching, only a sinewy, but orderly and open, presentation of the faith that holds. The result is as startling as it is beautiful.”

Rob Bell, author of *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, wrote a review in McLaren’s book that “Brian McLaren has a talent for expressing theological viewpoints in a way that doesn’t divide the camp. He gives everyone on the theological spectrum, from orthodox to progressive, something to chew on and contemplate.”

Christine Berghoef, author of *Cracking the Pot: Releasing God from the Theologies that Bind Him*, wrote a review in McLaren’s book that it “is a refreshing and inspiring reframing of the biblical narrative, based on modern biblical scholarship. It has deeply challenged our faith community to re-imagine what it means to be followers of Jesus.”

Wendy Tobias, lead priest for Unplugged at St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church in Boynton Beach, Florida, wrote a review in McLaren’s book that “If you’re looking for a progressive, thoughtful, inspirational resource for short-term or long-term Bible exploration I highly recommend WE MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING. I haven’t seen a more adaptable model that encourages those who gather and those who lead to experiment with what’s best for their particular situation or environment.”

In the Preface to his book, McLaren wrote –

“The title suggests that faith was never intended to be a destination, a status, a holding tank, or a warehouse. Instead, it was to be a road, a path, a way out of old and destructive patterns into new and creative ones. As a road or way, it is always being extended into the future. If a spiritual community only points back to where it has been or if it only digs in its heels where it is now, it is a dead end or a parking lot, not a way. To be a living tradition, a living way, it must forever open itself forward and forever remain unfinished—even as it forever cherishes and learns from the growing treasury of its past.”

McLaren’s *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004) is one of his best-known E/EC books. The full title of the book is – *A Generous Orthodoxy: WHY I AM A missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist + anabaptist/Anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished CHRISTIAN.* McLaren explained what he hoped readers would get from his book –

“I hope by its end you’ll find even more than you’re looking for now. The approach you’ll find here, which might be called *postcritical*, seeks to find a way to embrace the good in many traditions and historic streams of Christian faith, and to integrate them, yielding a new, generous, emergent approach that is

greater than the sum of its parts. This approach is both ancient/historical and avant-garde/innovative ... If I seem to show too little respect for your opinions or thought, be assured I have equal doubts about my own, and I don't mind if you think I'm wrong. I'm sure I am wrong about many things, although I'm not sure exactly what things I'm wrong about. I'm even sure I'm wrong about what I think I'm right about in at least some cases. So wherever you think I'm wrong, you could be right. If in the process of determining that I'm wrong, you are stimulated to think more deeply and broadly, I hope that I will have somehow served you anyway." From the Introduction to *A Generous Orthodoxy*

In McLaren's 2011 *Naked Spirituality: A Life with God in 12 Simple Words*, the author called for getting naked spiritually –

"It's about stripping away the symbols and status of public religion—the Sunday-dress version people often call 'organized religion.' And it's about attending to the well-being of the soul clothed only in naked human skin. As a result, it must be a vulnerable book, tender in tone, gentle in touch. You won't find much in the way of aggressive arguments here, but rather shy experience daring to step into the light. It's an honest book, and I hope a practical one too, perhaps with some awkward spiritual parallels to what they used to call a 'marital manual.' You won't need to agree with all the planks of my theological platform. I am a Christian, and all I write flows from my experience in that rich tradition, but you may be of another tradition entirely or of no

known tradition at all. Instead of seeking theological agreement, this book invites you to experiment with the naked experience of God that provides the raw material from which all worthwhile theology derives.” From the Preface to *Naked Spirituality*

Tony Jones

Tony Jones is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. He is also the theologian-in-residence at Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis. As we saw earlier in the section, the E/EC movement had its beginnings at his family’s cabin in the north woods of Minnesota at the turn of the 21st century.

Keeping in mind that the E/EC began with Tony Jones as one of the founding leaders, here is a look at the books he wrote beginning in 2001, along with brief descriptions for each book –

2001 – *Postmodern Youth Ministry*

“The rules have changed. Everything you believe is suspect. The world is up for grabs. Welcome to the emerging postmodern culture. A “free zone” of rapid change that places high value on community, authenticity, and even God--but has little interest in modern, Western-tinged Christianity. *Postmodern Youth Ministry* addresses these enormous philosophical shifts and shows how they’re affecting teenagers.”

2003 – *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*
(Emergent YS)

“Imagine coming to a crossroads where you're no longer sure who you are, why you do what you do, why you believe the way you do. You're not even sure you care. Where do you go? Follow the stories of people who were steeped in their beliefs--a former fundamentalist, a former Pentecostal, a former liberal, a former feminist, a former communist, and several other 'formers'--and walk with them on their journeys out of those beliefs. See what twists and turns arise before them, and find out what they learned (about faith, themselves, their beliefs, the world) as they emerged on the other side. This diverse group of Christian leaders discloses and shares in vulnerable, uncommon ways, allowing you full access into their doubts, fears, convictions, and unanswered questions. Each takes you on a path from absolute to authentic: from a place of false conviction and thin resolution, through struggles and growing pains, to a new place that's much more about process than about having 'arrived.' When it comes to journeys of faith, we often don't know what lies at the end of the road. It's difficult to take the first step when we are so unsure of the destination. As you read these stories, you'll find there is room to challenge your fears as well as your faith.”

2003 – *Soul Shaper*

“If you're unprepared for a book that makes faith come alive in practice, that makes past come alive in the present--and offers these gifts only if you're willing to spend significant time learning about the church's powerful, active spiritual heritage (and your place in it), then put this book down now. Still with us? Good! Because we really don't want you to miss this book. *Soul Shaper* is hands-down the most comprehensive primer on the study and use of spiritual and contemplative practices for the benefit of your teenagers--and especially your own soul. Inside, author Tony Jones gives wings to his critically acclaimed debut, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, by lucidly explaining how you can put postmodern ideas to work by learning powerful disciplines such as-- Sacred Reading The Jesus Prayer The Ignatian Examen The Daily Office Stations of the Cross Sabbath Silence and Solitude Centering Prayer Spiritual Direction The Labyrinth Pilgrimage Service ...and eventually implement them into the life of your youth ministry! But Jones cautions us all: 'These are not gimmicks. This isn't an Ideas book or a discussion starter book or a great-games-for-over-50-kids-in-a-gym book. This is a strange book. Although it's about spiritual exercises and their application in the practice of youth ministry, please practice them before you implement them! You won't come close to learning everything you need to know after reading this book. In fact, you may be a few years from utilizing any of these practices in your youth ministry. But if you find one or two

that you incorporate into your rule of life, I'm quite sure that you-- and the students God has put into your care--will be eternally changed as a result.' Complete with unparalleled instruction, deep and rich resources, and a look into Jones' research, travels, and personal journals as he bathed in the serene light of contemplative Christian spirituality, *Soul Shaper* is your next best step on the postmodern path.”

2003 – *Read. Think. Pray. Live. (TH1NK)*

“If you want to know Jesus and what He’s all about, you’ve got to know how to do these four things—read, think, pray, live. It’s how your faith can grow. *Lectio divina*, or sacred reading, is a time-tested method used by believers to experience God in a personal and real way.

Tailored for students, this book teaches you how to engage your faith. Learning from a teaching that has worked for hundreds of years, you’ll find yourself challenged and encouraged to get to know God in brand new ways.”

2003 – *Pray*

“The prayers of prophets, apostles, the early and modern church, and even Jesus himself can help young people pray more effectively.

Author Tony Jones highlights the important features of these powerful prayers so students can really enjoy talking to God.”

2005 – *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*
(Emergent YS)

“Broaden your spiritual horizons. How has spirituality changed in the last 500, 1,000, or even 2,000 years? How can ancient approaches to faith help my relationship with God today? In *The Sacred Way*, popular author and speaker Tony Jones mines the rich history of 16 spiritual disciplines that have flourished throughout the ages and offers practical tips for implementing them in your daily life. Find encouragement and challenge through time-tested disciplines such as: •Silence and solitude •The Jesus prayer •Meditation •Pilgrimage Explore these proven approaches to deepening your faith. As you do, your way of living your spiritual life will never be the same.”

2006 – *Diving Intervention: Encountering God Through the Ancient Practice of Lectio Divina*

“For 1500 years, Christians have used “sacred reading” or in Latin—*Lectio Divina*—as a way to tap into the power and vitality of God’s Word. For ancient Christians such as St. Augustine, St. Francis, and others it was a pillar of one’s daily relationship with God. Sound interesting? Learn how it works. Author and youth pastor Tony Jones explains the four steps of *Lectio Divina*: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). You’ll be amazed at the profound impact this practice will have on your spiritual life.

Includes 12 *lectio divina* exercises in the back with passages from *The Message Remix*.”

2008 – *A Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (emersion: Emergent Village resources for communities of faith)

“Engage the latest thinking of the emerging church. Since the emerging church started grabbing headlines early this millennium, it has been labeled many different things. A movement. A conversation. A friendship. Some even call it a scandal. *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* is a coming together of divergent voices into a collection of writings that will bring you into the latest thinking of the emerging church. You will have a front-row seat as both established leaders and up-and-comers in this influential international movement grapple with how to be faithful Christians in today's ever-changing cultural context. More than twenty-five contributors present honest, compelling, and at times highly personal reflections on topics like spiritual formation, social justice, sex, church and community, evangelism, racial reconciliation, postcolonialism, and the Bible. As you engage these reflections, you will come away with a deeper understanding of the hopeful imagination that drives the emerging church. And you will appreciate the beauty of a conversation that is continually being formed and, by its unique nature, defies one univocal message.”

2008 – *Ask, Seek, Knock: Prayers to Change Your Life*

“What do Abraham, Moses, Deborah, and David have in common? They all prayed and saw amazing results. Walk through the earliest models of prayer and discover how our Israelite forefathers prayed. Includes a prayer guide.”

2009 – *The Teaching of the Twelve: Believing & Practicing the Primitive Christianity of the Ancient Didache Community*

“The Didache is the most important book you've never read,” begins Tony Jones, in this engaging study.

The Didache is an early handbook of an anonymous Christian community, likely written before some of the New Testament books were written. It spells out a way of life for Jesus-followers that includes instruction on how to treat one another, how to practice the Eucharist, and how to take in wandering prophets. In *The Teaching of the Twelve*, Jones unpacks the ancient document, and he traces the life of a small house church in Missouri that is trying to live according to its precepts.

Readers will find *The Teaching of the Twelve* inspirational and challenging, and they will discover a unique window into the life of the very earliest followers of Jesus the Christ. A new, contemporary English translation of the Didache is included.”

2009 – *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*

“What the ‘Emergent Church Movement’ is all about-and why it matters to the future of Christianity

Following on the questions raised by Brian McLaren in *A New Kind of Christian*, Tony Jones has written an engaging exploration of what this new kind of Christianity looks like. Writing "dispatches" about the thinking and practices of adventurous Emergent Christians across the country, he offers an in-depth view of this new "third way" of faith-its origins, its theology, and its views of truth, scripture and interpretation, and the Emergent movement's hopeful and life-giving sense of community. With the depth of theological expertise and broad perspective he has gained as a pastor, writer, and leader of the movement, Jones initiates readers into the Emergent conversation and offers a new way forward for Christians in a post-Christian world. With journalistic narrative as well as authoritative reflection, he draws upon on-site research to provide fascinating examples and firsthand stories of who is doing what, where, and why it matters.”

2011 – *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement*

“*The Church Is Flat* is the first significant, researched study into the ecclesiology of the emerging church movement. Research into eight congregations is put into conversation with the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, concluding with pragmatic proposals for the

practice of a truly relational ecclesiology. Tony Jones visited eight emerging church congregations (Cedar Ridge Community Church, Pathways Church, Vintage Faith Church, Journey Church, Solomon's Porch, House of Mercy, Church of the Apostles, and Jacob's Well), facilitating interviews, focus groups, and surveys. After interpreting the data, Jones pulls out the most significant practices of these congregations and judges them relative to the relational ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann. Finally, Jones proposes a way forward for the emerging church movement, and the Protestant church writ large.

2012 – *A Better Atonement: Beyond the Depraved Doctrine of Original Sin*

“In *A Better Atonement*, theologian Tony Jones debunks the traditional doctrine of Original Sin and shows how that doctrine has polluted our view of the atonement. In an intriguing interlude, Jones distances himself from other progressive theologians and biblical scholars by strongly defending the historical crucifixion and physical resurrection of Jesus. Jones then summarizes various understandings of the atonement, from the ancient church to today, ultimately proposing a view that both takes into account a realistic view of sin and maintains an robust belief in the Trinity.

2013 – *Questions That Haunt Christianity: Volume 1*

“Why would a perfect God create an imperfect universe? Why didn't Jesus rescue himself from the cross? Will I retain my memories in Heaven? Theologian Tony Jones tackles these and other questions -- real questions from real people -- in the first volume of his series, *Questions That Haunt Christianity*. Jones delivers thoughtful, commonsense answers and provokes serious conversation about issues from the most abstract to the commonplace.”

2015 – *Did God Kill Jesus?: Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution*

“The popular Patheos blogger wants to restore the cross as primarily a symbol of God's overwhelming love for us and to rescue Christians from the shame and guilt from seeing our situation as “sinners in the hands of an angry God,” which was an invention of the medieval church and became enshrined as orthodox Christianity.

Many Christians believe that God the Father demanded his only Son die a cruel, gruesome death to appease His wrath, since humanity is so irredeemably sinful and therefore repugnant to God. Tony Jones, popular progressive Christian blogger, author, and scholar, argues that this understanding is actually a medieval invention and not what the Bible really teaches. He looks beyond medieval convictions and liberates how we see Jesus's death on the cross from this restrictive paradigm. Christians today must

transcend the shame and guilt that have shaped conceptions of the human soul and made us fearful of God, and replace them with love, grace, and joyfulness, which better expresses what the cross is really about.

How we understand the cross reflects directly what kind of God we worship. By letting go of the wrathful God who cannot stand to be in our presence unless he pretends to see Jesus in our place, we discover the biblical God who reaches out to love and embrace us while “we were yet sinners.” Jones offers a positive, loving, inclusive interpretation of the faith that is both challenging and inspiring. *Did God Kill Jesus?* is essential reading for modern Christians.”

Doug Pagitt

Doug Pagitt is one of the founders of the E/EC movement, along with Tony Jones, Brian McLaren and others listed in this chapter. He is a pastor at Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, is host of the Doug Pagitt Radio program, author, speaker, and owner of JoPa Productions.

Pagitt’s first books about E/EC was in 2004 with *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church*. That church was Solomon’s Porch, described by Pagitt as “a holistic, missional, Christian community in Minneapolis.”

Other Pagitt books include –

2005 – *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith (Emergentys)*

“The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith. This book isn't about quick-fix methods or bulleted, how-to lists. And it's certainly not a dry lecture about a heady theological topic. Instead this book is about striving, about trying, about experimenting with the idea that the old ways of approaching spiritual formation may not be the only avenues toward living lives in harmony with God in our day. Inside these pages you'll spend a full week with Solomon's Porch---a holistic, missional, Christian community in Minneapolis--- and get a front row seat at their gatherings, meetings, and meals. Along the way, you'll also discover what spiritual formation looks like in a church community that moves beyond education based practices by including worship, physicality, dialogue, hospitality, belief, creativity, and service as means toward spiritual formation rather than mere appendices to it. Specifically, you'll get a glimpse into the lives of six people from Solomon's Porch and track their growth through their journals as they wrestle with various approaches to spiritual development. Church Re-Imagined is ideal for thinkers, pastors, church leaders, and anyone else seeking fresh ways of experiencing life with God.”

2005 – *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith*

“Are we preaching too much, engaging too little? What is the role of preaching in the postmodern Church? Author and pastor Doug Pagitt looks at the kind of preaching that 'creates followers of God who serve the world well and live the invitation to the rhythm of God.' He introduces you to an approach to engaging with the Bible with a focus on three questions: -What kind of communities are we forming? (Sociology) -What story are we telling? (Theology) -How can we tell it more effectively? (Communications) These questions are asked through the introduction of Progressional Implicatory Preaching---an innovative way of catalyzing an open dialogue with active participants. Envision Preaching Re-Imagined as an agent in the creation of Christian communities, and take a hopeful look toward new approaches to encouraging the spiritual formation of your church body.”

2008 – *A Emergent Manifesto of Hope* [written with Tony Jones]

“Engage the latest thinking of the emerging church Since the emerging church started grabbing headlines early this millennium, it has been labeled many different things. A movement. A conversation. A friendship. Some even call it a scandal. *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* is a coming together of divergent voices into a collection of writings that will bring you into the latest thinking of the emerging church. You will have a front-row seat as

both established leaders and up-and-comers in this influential international movement grapple with how to be faithful Christians in today's ever-changing cultural context. More than twenty-five contributors present honest, compelling, and at times highly personal reflections on topics like spiritual formation, social justice, sex, church and community, evangelism, racial reconciliation, postcolonialism, and the Bible. As you engage these reflections, you will come away with a deeper understanding of the hopeful imagination that drives the emerging church. And you will appreciate the beauty of a conversation that is continually being formed and, by its unique nature, defies one univocal message. “

2009 – *A Christianity Worth Believing: Hope-filled, Open-armed, Alive-and-well Faith for the Left Out, Left Behind, and Let Down in us All*

“A Christianity Worth Believing offers an engaging, 'come-with-me-on-a-journey-of-exploring-the-possibilities' approach to what it means to be a follower of Jesus in our day. Written by Doug Pagitt a leading voice in the Emergent conversation--this beautifully written book weaves together theological reflections, Christian history, and his own story of faith transformation. Pagitt invites readers to follow him as he tells the story of his un-churched childhood, his life-altering conversion at age 16, his intense involvement in the church, and his growing sense of unease with the version of Christianity he was living. On page after page, Pagitt lays out his journey toward an authentic, passionate expression of a faith that feels alive, sustainable, and meaningful.”

2013 – *BodyPrayer: The Posture of Intimacy with God* [written with Kathryn Prill]

“It’s possible for prayer to become so routine that it’s almost meaningless. Head-oriented prayer can focus on getting the words just right, while leaving out the rest of who you are. *BodyPrayer* helps you become fully engaged in prayer as you connect with God using more than mere words. By practicing various postures of prayer—many of them identical to those modeled in Scripture—you will open your life more fully to God. Body prayer involves all of who you are as you enter into communion with God, either individually or with other believers. Join Christians throughout history who used their entire being as a prayer—in expressions of joy, gratitude, and entreaty, as well as worship and devotion to God. This biblically based guide will help you practice a richer, more meaningful expression of prayer—one that involves your body as well as your soul. This is prayer that goes deeper than words. Engage your physical senses in a spiritual discipline...If your spirituality lacks passion, you can find new life in the ancient practice of body prayer. When you adopt postures that express the burdens of your heart, you bring all of who you are into God’s presence. *BodyPrayer* invites twenty-eight ways to involve your entire being as you connect with God. Whether you pray in submission with forehead touching the ground, or in exaltation with arms outstretched and eyes raised to heaven, you will find new spiritual vitality in prayer that expresses

all of who you are. Avoid the recitation of empty words and move your prayer life into the realm of whole-life engagement. When you use your body to express what words often fail to say, you are drawn closer to God. Body, soul, and spirit.”

2014 – *Church in the Inventive Age*

“Many books seek to predict the future of Christianity, but few help us grasp the opportunities of the current situation and equip us to navigate the present. Doug Pagitt, author, radio host, and pioneering leader, does just that, offering fresh, optimistic insights and practical suggestions. According to Pagitt, the last two centuries can be divided into four epochs: Idyllic, Industrial, Informational and now-Inventive. The Inventive Age - our currently reality - presents distinct opportunities for how faith communities think, what they value, and the tools they use. Pagitt offers leaders in Christian communities (and beyond) essential frameworks for participation in the Inventive Age.”

2014 – *Preaching in the Inventive Age*

“What kind of communities are we forming? What story are we telling? How can we tell it more effectively? Pagitt takes on these questions and investigates the goals and roles of preaching in the Inventive Age. From the book: ‘I find myself wanting to live with the people of my community, where I can preach ... but not allow that to become an act of speech making. Instead, I want it to be a living interaction of the story of God and the story of our community

being connected by our truth telling, our vulnerability, and our open minds, ears, and eyes – all brought together by the active work of the Spirit of God....”

2014 – *Evangelism in the Inventive Age*

“We live in changing times of significant cultural change. In the Inventive Age (the cultural turning following the Agrarian, Industrial, and Information ages) how people think has changed. This has created a new context for Evangelism. Previous methods not only do not work, they are often counterproductive. Evangelism in the Inventive Age is not a "next-level" resource for those who are already comfortable and confident evangelists, but is a book for the rest of us. For most Christians the issue of converting other people or sharing their faith is a troubled endeavor. Very few are in a comfortable place of natural invitation, faithful integration, and hopefulness in sharing faith. This book will create a new perspective on evangelism for the ordinary person who has extraordinary questions. Evangelism in the Inventive Age is for those who have deep questions about the validity of evangelism and for whom evangelism does not come naturally.”

2014 – *Community in the Inventive Age*

“The Inventive Age (the cultural turning following the Agrarian, Industrial, and Information ages) provides opportunities for reshaping all institutions and communities. Doug Pagitt brings to life ten Inventive Age characteristics as they are experienced

through the community of Solomon's Porch - a holistic missional Christian community in Minneapolis. These ten characteristics of Inventive Age culture will serve as a guide for those creating new faith communities and making changes in existing ones.”

2015 – Flipped: The Provocative Truth That Changes Everything We Know About God

“We all have stories in our heads about God, humanity, life, and the meaning of it all. One of the most common—and misleading—stories is “If I’m faithful in doing *this*, then God promises to do *that*.” Jesus didn’t believe it and neither should you. God does not insist that you play by the rules before he will respond to you. A careful reading of the Bible will free all of us from trying to make a deal with God, inviting us instead to live in God.

How would your life change if you flipped your understanding of God? Doug Pagitt takes a new look at provocative statements made by Jesus, Paul, and the prophets. Jesus turned the tables on religious assumptions every time he began with “You have heard it said, but I say to you...” Paul quoted a pagan poet when he revealed the truth that we live, move, and have our being in God. Come along on a journey of discovery and change, leading to a flip in your view of where God is and where we are in relation to God. Set aside the rules of religion and know the freedom of living in God.”

Books are one important way leaders of a movement communicate with members and potential members. Another way is online and social media.

The Emergent Village, one of the early E/EC websites, is now Emerging Voices. This is from the “History” section of The Emergent Village –

“Emergent Village began as a group of friends who gathered under the auspices and generosity of Leadership Network in the late 1990s. We began meeting because many of us were disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late 20th century. The more we met, the more we discovered that we held many of the same dreams for our lives, and for how our lives intersected with our growing understandings of the King of God.”

Leadership Network’s website (leadnet.org) states the group began in 1984 with 20 leaders and that number has grown in 30 years to more than 200,000 leaders around the world. Their focus is to “work with the few to influence the Many.”

This is the Welcome from the new website, Emerging Voices –

“The Emerging Voices blog picks up where the Emergent Village Voice left off. We are no less than 31 rotating voices speaking daily into this movement to continue conversations around Emergence and emerging Christianity. We hope that by keeping

this space alive, all those who are emerging can find mile markers of resonance along their journey. We also hope to inspire action for justice among Emergent, emerging, progressive Christians and all allies of hope, so that might put our faith, together, toward praxis and help make the world we inhabit more Christ-like. We are 50% women, 50% people of color, 25% LGBTQ and 10% international voices and we have much to say.”

Many of the leaders in the Emerging/Emergent Church movement have websites and are blogging. They are a rich resource in both the history and current positions of the E/EC. Some of are involved in social media. We share several of those sites for further investigation.

Brian D. McLaren –

www.brianmclaren.net

www.facebook.com/Brian-D-McLaren-65814657989/

twitter.com/brianmclaren?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mdosTcYBnk

Tony Jones –

tonyj.net/#sthash.hz4qQRHg.9NKji24g.dpbs

www.facebook.com/jonestony?_rdr=p

twitter.com/jonestony

plus.google.com/+TonyJonesAuthor/posts

www.youtube.com/user/newchristians

Doug Pagitt –

www.dougpagitt.com/

www.dougpagitt.com/blog/

www.facebook.com/pagitt.doug

twitter.com/pagitt?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

www.youtube.com/channel/UCjIZVOmXJB2e-FUMhR0o2tA

Tim Keel –

www.timkeel.com/

www.facebook.com/timkeel

twitter.com/timothykeel?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-UOBLwQHB4

Chris Seay –

chrisseay.net/

www.facebook.com/chris.seay.31

twitter.com/EcclesiaHouston

vimeo.com/ecclesiahouston

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhkqSM37CRA

Tim Conder –

www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/tim-conder/

www.facebook.com/tim.conder1

www.emmausway.net/

www.facebook.com/emmausway

Spiritual Considerations

What are the spiritual implications of the E/EC movement that Christians should consider?

I saw some of this coming during the 1970s. Young people then were looking for something different, something “real” in church experiences. I attended many national youth and church conferences where leaders talked about how to make church “relevant” to young

people. Some conferences focused on the importance of preaching the Gospel and making disciples through the teachings (doctrine) of Christ. Other conferences focused on the importance of young people experiencing a “journey” through God’s love and making disciples based on unity in His love for all people. One group focused on the historical “orthodoxy” of the Church, while the other group focused on “orthopraxy” of the Church.

The tension between the different spiritual philosophies was clear to me as a young Christian (saved in 1971). What was also clear was that the tension would take the “church” in a variety of separate, if not oppositional, directions. In the 40+ years since attending many different church leadership conferences, we have seen many different kinds of “church” initiatives birthed or expanded. Here is a short list in alphabetical order –

Attractional

Charismatic

Confessional

Convergence

Emergence

Evangelical

Foundational

Fundamental

Gay Church

House Church

Jesus Movement

LGBT Welcoming

Liberational

Liturgical

Missional

Pentecostal

Postmodern

Progressive

Prosperity

Reformational

Relational

Relative

Renewal

Restorational

Revival

Seeker Sensitive

Shepherding

Third Wave

So, what's a young Christian to do? Does it matter which "movement" we join? Aren't all groups that identify as "Christian" basically the same?

1970 is the year many authors and commentators have chosen as the beginning of the "post-modern era" in culture, art, architecture, philosophy, academics, economics and history. Some have joined it to "deconstructionism" and "post-structuralism." The term "postmodernism" was first used in a philosophical lexicon in 1979 when Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote *La Condition Postmoderne* (English version, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

In his book *A Primer On Postmodernism*, E/EC author Stanley Grenz wrote –

"The term *postmodern* may first have been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already under way and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. But postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s. First it denoted a new style of architecture. Then it invaded academic circles, originally as a label for theories expounded in

university English and philosophy departments. Eventually it surfaced as the description for a broader cultural phenomenon. Whatever else it might be, as the name suggests, postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launched under the conditions of modernity. Therefore, to understand postmodern thinking, we must view it in the context of the modern world that gave it birth and against what it is reacting.” A Primer on Postmodernism, Stanley Grenz, Eerdmans Publishing, 1996

I remember the 1970s as a young Christian talking with other young Christians about what it meant to be a Christian in a changing world. Many young Christians believed it was important for the Church to change with the times and become relevant to the needs and demands of young people in western society. The “old” ways were not working and “new” ways should be embraced with hope. Many young Christians were in the process of turning from “orthodoxy” to “orthopraxy.”

Those discussions eventually led to the issue of “absolutism vs relativism” and “objectivism vs. subjectivism.” E/EC co-founder Brian McLaren, who views the Gospel as more relational/missional than informational, was quoted for an article for Christianity Today in 2004

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“I think most Christians grossly misunderstand the philosophical baggage associated with terms like absolute and objective (linked to foundationalism and the myth of neutrality). Similarly,

arguments that pit absolutism versus relativism, and objectivism versus subjectivism, prove meaningless or absurd to postmodern people: They're wonderful modern arguments that backfire with people from the emerging culture." Brian McLaren, "The Broadened Gospel," in "Emergent Evangelism," *Christianity Today* 48, Nov. 2004, p 43

The conversations I had with other Christians during the 1970s and the conferences I attended demonstrated the importance of knowing *what* I believed and *why* I believed it. As a former atheist, I had come to Christianity through a process of investigating the evidence for theism, the Bible and Christianity. It was the "objective" nature of the evidence that convinced me of its "truth." What I saw and heard coming from discussions and conferences in the 70s was serious questioning of those evidences I had already found to be true. Could it be that "Christian truth" was subjective truth rather than objective truth? Could it be that truth was really "relative" and open to discussion and self-determination? McClaren wrote that "Because knowledge is a luxury beyond our means, faith is the best we can hope for." (McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, Zondervan, 2003, 173)

That's an interesting statement – "knowledge is beyond our means, faith is the best we can hope for." Really? I had a problem with that kind of thinking in the 70s and still do. Dr. Norman Geisler looks at McLaren's "relative" philosophy this way –

“One of the more difficult aspects of McLaren’s writings is his seeming unwillingness to say anything definitive about what he believes. He seems to want to be able to present his understanding of a given doctrine, but he doesn’t want to say anything that might give others a basis upon which to critique his views. He wants to retain the right to say what he thinks is the correct way to depict a doctrine or belief, but he doesn’t want to express himself in a manner that others can challenge.” Norman Geisler, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, B&H Academic, 2009,

In his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren wrote –

“Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did not come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did *not* come to create another exclusive religion—Judaism having been exclusive based on genetics and Christianity being exclusive based on belief (which can be a tougher requirement than genetics!).” *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Brian McLaren, Zondervan, 2006, p 110

One of the statements by Jesus Christ that I had already investigated while still an atheist was His claims to exclusivity (e.g. John 14:16). If Jesus was not “exclusive,” there would have been no reason for me to have become a Christian. I could have either remained an atheist, or if I believed God existed in some form, could have chosen any belief system that acknowledged the existence of God and catered to my personal preferences. If Jesus did not come to present Himself as

the one and only exclusive Lord and Savior, then what Jesus said and did does not matter in the real world.

Geisler believes McLaren and other Emergent leaders are “post-Christian” in their view of Scripture –

“Scripture is the most fundamental of all the fundamental doctrines, since it is the fundamental on which all the other fundamentals rest. And on their view of Scripture, Grenz and McLaren are not only postmodern but they are also post-Christian. Their rejection of the classical orthodox view of Scripture is sweeping. It includes a rejection of the correspondence view of truth, a rejection of objective truth, absolute truth, propositional truth, and inerrant truth in Scripture. This it does in favor of antifoundationalism, relativism, subjectivism, constructionism, and Barthianism, no propositionalism, and fallibilism. The so-called emerging church is not emerging; it has already emerged. And what it has emerged into is not Christian in any traditional, historic, or orthodox sense of the words.” *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, p 107

Here are other insights into E/EC from co-writers of *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent* –

“True to its postmodern provenance, the revision recommended by McLaren deconstructs present beliefs and practices. In so doing, it does not seek to recover the faith of our ancient Christian

forebears; instead, it prepares the way for novel beliefs and practices to replace old ones. So revision departs from the present not in order to return to the faith of the apostles but rather to carve out a new and distinct faith. Both reform and revision a la McLaren would thus have us depart from modern beliefs and practices; once underway, however, they would chart radically different courses—one ancient, one postmodern.” Douglas Blount, p 120-121

“People in the E/e movement are thinking through how to present Jesus in a changing world. They are looking for fresh angles and emphases. Part of the value of such newness is that presenting the gospel from a fresh angle can have freshness that the retelling of a well-known version can lack. The question is not whether the story is different or has a different style (narrative versus didactic for example; sermon versus dialogical delivery); it is whether the difference still reflects the experience of knowing Jesus in a way that coheres with the depth and balance in scriptural teaching.” Darrell L. Bock, p 159

“Others within the emerging church movement, such as Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, write that it was not Jesus’ intention to die as a propitiation of God’s wrath for the sins of the world. Instead, Jesus died because He threatened the religious community by breaking their rules, which He did out of His sacrificial love for others. Christians, then, need to ‘balance’ penal substitution—which ‘can reinforce a caricature of a God who is angry,

bloodthirsty, and judgmental’—with good works done in love. After all, they assert, ‘[w]hat counts is not a belief system but a holistic approach of following what you feel, experience, discover, and believe; it is a willingness to join Jesus in his vision for a transformed humanity.’ Robert Sagers, p 196-197

“One of the most common emphases to appear in discussions of worship among emerging church leaders is the need for worship to be experiential. Sally Morgenthaler and Dan Kimball both see the emphasis on experienced linked with how people in the emerging culture come to know. Morgenthaler says, ‘Having shift from ‘knowing-by-notion’ to ‘knowing-by-narrative,’ realignment [her term for worship] in emerging congregations is experiential more than mental, sensory more than read,’ involving worshipers on every level: ‘visual, aural, tactile, kinetic, emotional, and cerebral.’ Dan Kimball explains that while modern people begin with learning facts, which then influence beliefs which then guide behavior, for postmodern people everything begins with experience, which influences behavior, which only then leads to beliefs.” John Hammett, p 238

“If Brian McLaren is the Emergent church’s ‘most influential thinker’ and the movement’s ‘de facto spiritual leader,’ Doug Pagitt is its premier homiletician. As a member of the ‘Organizing Group’ in the Emergent Village, he serves as founding pastor of Solomon’s Porch, a self-described ‘Holistic, Missional, Christian Community’ in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In his book *Preaching Re-*

Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith, he calls for traditional preaching to be replaced by ‘progressional dialogue’ that ‘involves the intentional interplay of multiple viewpoints that leads to unexpected and unforeseen ideas. The message will change depending on who is present and who says what. This kind of preaching is dynamic in the sense that the outcome is determined on the spot by participants.’ McLaren acquiesces, saying, ‘I’ve found that the more my preaching mirrors the flow of a conversation, the more people connect with it.’ As an additional component to this idea of preaching as an ongoing conversation, many Emergent revisionists view Scripture as simply one of the participants. Rejecting the idea that the Bible is the sole authority on spiritual truth, they believe that the Christian community has an equal role to play in the preaching event. Pagitt asserts, ‘The Bible ought to live as an authoritative member of our community, one we listen to on all topics of which she speaks. Understanding the Bible as a community member means giving the Bible the freedom to speak for herself. Sometimes that will mean getting out of the way and putting less effort into interpreting Scripture for others, instead letting them carry out their own relationship with what the Bible says.’ So, as opposed to being the sole authority for faith and practice, the Bible is merely one contributor sitting around the table—alongside experience and collective wisdom—as ‘an authoritative member of the community.’ Jim Shaddix, p 283-284

“The apostle Paul was quite clear about the gospel: ‘For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is through proclaiming this message that God has chosen to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21). The message of the gospel is undeniably a set of truth claims, and apart from these truths there can be no true evangelism. Indeed, these truths direct us to the One who saves. While not all emerging church leaders would deny the necessity of these truths, their leaning away from propositional truth risks doing ‘evangelism’ without ever getting to the message essential to New Testament evangelism. The frightening result is that some might assume their salvation apart from knowing essential truths; for example, McLaren relates the story of a man who becomes a follower of Jesus while not knowing why Jesus died (in fact, while accepting McLaren’s assertion that even Jesus did not know why He had to die). New Testament evangelism is much more than McLaren’s understanding of evangelism as friendliness in the spirit of Jesus; instead, it is the announcement of clear biblical truths that point the way to salvation.” Chuck Lawless, p 323-324

Adam Greenway writes an excellent conclusion to *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent* –

“Perhaps the most consistent criticism leveled against Emergent in this volume (and elsewhere) has been the overarching lack of

concern for doctrinal content and precision. While ‘generous orthodoxy’ seems to be the Emergent desire, many of its leaders have clearly moved beyond the pale of orthodoxy in order to uphold some overarching sense of generosity. Whether it be the redefining of hell and eternal punishment, the embracing of forms of soteriological inclusivism or pluralism, the discounting of Jesus’ deity and penal substitutionary atonement, or the minimizing of the need for evangelism and missions because of nonconversionist theological worldviews (to simply highlight again a few issues treated within this book), the serious evangelical observers notices tragically little within Emergent that resonates with ‘the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all’ (Jude 3) and much that resembles ‘another Jesus’ (2 Cor. 11:4) and ‘a different gospel’ (Gal. 1:6).”

Perspective

It doesn’t seem that long ago that I was a ‘young’ Christian with great hopes and dreams about what living life as a Christian would be. Having come out of atheism, I was hungry to learn about God. I attended every Bible study I could and was at church whenever the doors were open. I read the Bible as often as I could and talked with other Christians about what everything in it meant.

I remember reading these words of Jesus to His disciples – “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome

the world” (John 16:33). I wasn’t a new Christian for long before I discovered that experiencing tribulation in the world included having trouble in Christian community as well. That includes, but is not limited to, attending boring church services with even more boring sermons, Christians disagreeing with each other about matters big and small, and even worse, Christians stabbing each other in the back and trying to destroy one another because of pride and jealousy.

So, what does a young Christian do when faced with the realities of being Christian in the “real” world? If our experience is not a positive one, where do we go? Do we abandon faith as some do or change what it means to be Christian? Or do we do the hard work of being Christian – the hard work Jesus told His disciples about and the hard work they and their followers did in the 1st century? Did the early Christian disciples change what Jesus taught them because the road was long and hard and many of the people they preached the Gospel to wanted to kill them? Did they change the message and emphasis to make the Gospel palatable to a larger audience? Did the disciples make some mid-course adjustments to emphasize Conversations over Conversions? Reflections over Revelation? Stories over Salvation? Journeys over Jesus? Friendships over Faith?

The answer to those questions should be clear to us all by now.

“But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you

were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." Hebrews 10:32-39

The so-called "unity" of the Emerging and Emergent Church is a danger to the health of the True Church and should be avoided and exposed.

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